CUSTOMS IN EATING

The Tanala family rises at dawn and goes to work at once, to take advantage of the morning coolness. If any food is left from the previous night's meal, there will be a cold breakfast, but no cooking is done at this time. The first regular meal is served a little before noon and the second at sunset. Hospitality is casual and universal. Anyone who is in the house when a meal is ready partakes as a matter of course.

On all ordinary occasions the food is regularly served, not eaten from the pot. The woman of the house spreads a clean mat on the floor near the fireplace and everyone washes his hands and mouth. The woman then dishes out the rice and vegetable foods while the man divides and distributes the meat, if there is any. The husband's rice, and that of honored guests, is served separately, while the women and children eat from a common dish. In most parties it is customary to place the dish of the husband or guest on a small stand of basket-work, 1½ to 2 inches high (Fig. 8, f, g, h). This symbolizes his elevation above the rest of the household.

The rice is served first. When a mound of it has been piled on each dish, the woman flattens the top of it with the back of her rice ladle and pours on the other food. The salt and pimento mortars have been placed on the mat and each one seasons his own food with them. The head of the house is served first and no one else can begin eating until he has commenced. Each person has his own spoon and it is considered the height of ill manners to plunge the hands into the common dish. Foods which have to be eaten with the fingers, such as meat, are served separately. Simple forks, made from straight pieces of bone, are sometimes used.

The natives usually eat rapidly and almost in silence. When the food has been consumed, the hands and mouth are washed again and everyone relaxes. They lie about and chat for a half hour or more. The woman gathers up the dishes and throws the scraps of food out of the door, to the chickens. Wooden utensils are washed after each meal and hung up to dry. Spoons, after washing, are placed in small openwork baskets (Fig. 13, f) or thrust through holes in a narrow strip of matting (Fig. 7, j). These spoon holders are usually hung from the center post of the house, above the fireplace. The cooking pots are rarely washed, this being considered a waste of time.

The natives have enormous appetites. A Tanala man will eat two to three times as much, by bulk, as a white laborer. They are